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# DETERMINING TRENDS IN UNFAVORABLE CONSUMER EVENTS

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## PURPOSE

To assist DDSN and provider administrative staff in analyzing the causes of unfavorable events in the lives of consumers.

## INTRODUCTION

DDSN and its provider network have the responsibility to prevent, as much as is humanly possible, the occurrence of unfavorable events in the lives of consumers served. Examples of unfavorable consumer events include the following: abuse, mistreatment, exploitation, critical incidents, accidents/ injuries, medication errors, preventable illnesses, preventable restraints, and preventable deaths.

It is very important that service providers have reliable systems for reporting, analyzing, and following up on unfavorable consumer events. Each of these systems should be governed by policies and procedures, and have sufficient resources at their disposal to assure that corrective actions are undertaken to lessen the occurrence of unfavorable consumer events in the future.

## IDENTIFYING TRENDS

Once unfavorable consumer event data has been collected and obvious trends or patterns have been identified (i.e. “eyeballing” the data), it is important to have a strategy to analyze the data in a more in-depth fashion in order to identify as many additional trends or patterns as possible.

Thinking of the exercise as a kind of experiment may facilitate this process of trend identification and analysis. A person or team may sift through the data and then develop “hunches” or hypotheses as to what might be the cause(s) of the unfavorable consumer event.

Once a hunch or hypothesis has been thought of, then it can be tested by comparing what it claims against the data that has been collected on that kind of unfavorable consumer event. If trends or patterns emerge, then the hunch or hypothesis is confirmed, and the agency has a solid place to start in its prevention efforts.

Hunches or hypotheses that can assist in identifying trends in unfavorable consumer events may be developed by focusing on three areas: Consumer Variables; Staff Variables; and External Variables. By focusing methodically on the variables in these three areas, the provider may be able to identify trends or patterns between the unfavorable event and one variable, or identify more complex patterns between the unfavorable event and multiple variables.

After trends or patterns have been identified, then through training, policy/ procedure change, staffing change, environmental changes, etc., the provider may be able to reduce the likelihood that that type of unfavorable consumer event will occur in the future.

## DEVELOPING HUNCHES (HYPOTHESES)

In the quality assurance and consumer-oriented risk management literature, the below-listed variables have all been associated with some types of unfavorable consumer events. Staff may want to test whether patterns or trends exist between the unfavorable event(s) and these variables. The variables make up the substance of the

hunch or hypothesis. For example, under Consumer Variables, Consumer age, a simple hunch or hypothesis might be “Elderly consumers are more subject to falls”, or another example might be “Young children are more subject to abuse.” And so on through those variables that apply to the unfavorable event(s) that are under consideration.

#### Consumer Variables

- ☐ Consumer age—(e.g.; elderly; children)
- ☐ Consumer gender
- ☐ Medical diagnoses—(e.g.; aspiration; GERD)
- ☐ Type of disability—(e.g.; MR; Spinal cord injury)
- ☐ Level of disability—(e.g.; mild; severe)
- ☐ Communication ability—(e.g.; non-verbal; verbal)
- ☐ Kinds of injuries—(e.g.; fracture; bruise; fall; bed sore)
- ☐ Involvement or lack of involvement of medical specialists—(e.g.; used; never referred)
- ☐ Cause of death—(e.g.; trauma; dehydration; bowel obstruction)
- ☐ Location of death—(e.g.; home; work; ER; while a hospital in-patient)

#### Staff Variables

- ☐ Employee
- ☐ Length of service—(e.g.; months; years)
- ☐ Level or types of training—(e.g.; CPR; First Aid; PRA)
- ☐ Age of employee
- ☐ Gender of employee
- ☐ Staff to client ratio—(e.g.; 1 to 4)
- ☐ Shift—(e.g.; 1st, 2nd, 3rd)
- ☐ Day of week
- ☐ Regular staff or contract staff; “pulls” or overtime
- ☐ Number of hours worked/ on duty

#### External Variables

- ☐ Specific residence
- ☐ Specific day program
- ☐ Specific location within the building—(e.g.; bathroom; bedroom; kitchen)
- ☐ Environmental risks—(e.g.; slippery floors; stairs; playgrounds; swimming pools; busy street)
- ☐ Level/ type of home/ program—(e.g.; ICF/MR; CTH; SLP)
- ☐ Weather—(e.g.; dark; rainy; windy)
- ☐ Season of the year
- ☐ Provider
- ☐ Region of the state
- ☐ Level of family involvement—(e.g.: highly involved to no contact)

As the agency becomes more and more familiar with unfavorable consumer event data it has collected, it can add other variables to this listing that may assist in understanding, and ultimately in preventing, as much as is humanly possible, unfavorable consumer events.

## **CONCLUSION**

Using Consumer, Staff, or External variables to test for trends or patterns in unfavorable consumer event data will assist staff in determining what changes or improvements can be made (and in what order of priority) in order to lessen the occurrence of these unfavorable consumer events in the future.